The Wall Jumper Study Guide

The Wall Jumper by Peter Schneider (writer)

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The Wall Jumper by Peter Schneider examines life in the two halves of Berlin during the era of the Wall, showing psychological differences more profound than the physical separation. The Narrator collects the stories of a number of wall jumpers.

The Wall Jumper by Peter Schneider finds an anonymous Narrator, 20 years an inhabitant of the divided city of Berlin, collecting stories about those who have illegally gone over the wall. Seen from the air, Berlin appears one, and objects of everyday life on the ground seem identical, but the East has a characteristic smell and its population looks and acts gray. West Berliners look on them like caged zoo animals. The Narrator, a frustrated writer of fiction, collects stories about people who have jumped the wall in both directions. He goes back and forth, legally, through checkpoints, gathering material.

In West Berlin, the Narrator's friend, Robert, an exiled Eastern writer, tells him about Kabe, who jumps a record 15 times. That West and East Germany view the postwar division quite differently shows in how the people think and act. The Narrator visits his Eastern friend Pommerer, another writer, and learns of three Eastern youngsters who jump the Wall to enjoy Western movies. Easterners resent being judged for having resigned their lives to reality. The East is building while the West is renovating. Robert relates the tragic/comic story of Walter Bolle's frustrated vendetta against the DDR. The friends witness a staged protest and disagree over the political subjectivity of media coverage of current events. Like Robert, the Narrator's ex-lover, Lena, is to his mind a typical product of East German upbringing: neurotic and controlling because of her insecurities.

Back in East Berlin, Pommerer has gotten in trouble with the Writers' Union and may need to move West. The Narrator collects two more odd stories before visiting an aunt in rural Dresden. He contemplates how different his life might have been had he met Russians rather than Americans in 1945. Would he be recognizable as himself? Where does the State end and self begin?

The Cold War has heated up as the Soviets invade Afghanistan and the U.S. leads a boycott of the Olympics. East Germans debate their chances of bringing home gold medals. During his next entry to East Berlin the Narrator is arbitrarily refused. He realizes that the walls of Berlin will outlive everyone alive.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Seen from the air, Berlin is a single city, a maze of fortress-like, rectangular structures. New housing on the edges seem to have been dropped in place by helicopter. The Wall zigzags through, allowing only shadows to pass freely. The Narrator has lived 20 years in this scarred, antiquated, but living city.

Landing at Schönefield Airport, only Germans fail to curse the uncomfortable shuttle bus. Clothing and expressions differentiate those West- and East-bound. A man who could be Polish, Bulgarian, or Russian asks to share a cab with the Narrator cannot understand believe that anyone lives in West Berlin, for the map shows no streets there. On Western maps, the Wall is a light pink line; on Eastern ones it is as thick as a finger, marking a state border.

The Wall has just gone up when the Narrator moves to Berlin. After the initial shock, West Germans see it as a symbol of a detested social order and a mirror showing them to be the fairest of them all. The Narrator's early forays into East Berlin are unremarkable. He meets Wolf Biermann, but cannot learn why the exiled singer still prefers the East. The two half-cities are physically similar but after just 30 years the people subconsciously obey fundamentally different rules in the way they talk and behave.

The Narrator lives in an apartment building formerly owned by the gentry, serviced by those who live in garden houses in the rear. Cut off from city noise, the back apartments are peaceful. Up front, two bars lease the bottom floor, one German and one Bolivian. The patrons vandalize cars in different ways, but the garbage on the path to the door is identical. Tenants rarely meet but can be distinguished by their noise. The Narrator enjoys an elderly violinist's practicing until he dies. A colorful, distinguished man of about 70 is appears to live a carefree, serene life.

The Narrator first meets writer Robert in East Berlin before he is forbidden to publish and moves nearby. They meet regularly at Charlie's for pinball. Robert denies a "German question," and they inevitably take opposite positions on any political or historical matter. Robert resents being called "typically DDR" (pg. 21) and is comfortable only as a "boundary-walker" (pg. 23) between states. Another such is Gerhard Schlater, the Narrator's first landlord in Berlin, a boundless optimist until a love affair fails. He lets himself go physically and eventually moves East.

On his first visit to the Wall, the Narrator watches bus loads of tourists wave to one another on the two sides and take pictures of Hitler's cordoned-off and buried bunker. The evening news reports a UN resolution on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Eastern and Western broadcasts look identical but emphasize polar opposites. Whereas BRD politicians fiercely debate re-unification and deny the existence of an

East German state, most West Germans feel no longer feel intense separation pain. Robert tells the narrator the story of Kabe, a poor, middle-aged West Berliner who jumps the Wall 15 times to the East, being sent each time for psychiatric evaluation and straining German-German relations and finances. The BRD lacks constitutional grounds for institutionalizing him, since from its point of view the DDR does not exist Kabe claims that life is too quiet not to jump.

On the eve of his first extended visit to the DDR, the Narrator dreams about his former lover, Lena. Before he can touch her he falls overboard from a boat. In real life, he phones her in the morning, eager for sex, but she is busy packing for a trip

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 opens with a view of Berlin from the air and characterizes it as a single city, almost incidentally crossed by a Wall. Author Peter Schneider uses the image of the airplane's shadow passing freely from side to side and disappearing as it touches down. Nothing else but birds possess such freedom of movement. Schneider's Narrator, `whose identity is carefully shielded so as not to allow the presumption that this story is autobiographical, has lived 20 years in Berlin, which he describes in rich detail as still scarred from revolution and war, antiquated in the advertising that is still displayed, but somehow a more vital city than in the rest of Germany. He emphasizes the fortress-like, rectangular structures in the center, contrasting with new housing on the edges, which seem to have been dropped in place by helicopters—Soviet or American.

The Narrator begins showing the difference between the Germanys by depicting a wintertime landing at Schönefield Airport, which serves passengers headed East and West. Foreigners are loud and abusive, contrasting with passive Germans. He paints the differences between Easterners and Westerners by their clothing, accessories, language (High German vs. dialects), and expressions. Those heading West look on the others like zoo animals. The West German sense of superiority pervades the book. Contrast this with the Eastern view that the Wall is a state border beyond which nothing exists, shown graphically on Eastern maps, which show no streets in the blank Western half. A pointedly Eastern-bloc foreigner wanting to share a cab cannot understand how a city can be divided.

West Germans see the Wall both as a symbol of a detested social order, Communism, and as a mirror that shows them to be the fairest of them all, a clear allusion to the Brothers Grimm's Snow White. The two half-cities are physically alike but after just 30 years the people subconsciously obey different laws in how they talk and behave. New York is easier to understand than East Berlin, despite its proximity. In a rather bizarre interlude, tourists on both sides of the Wall look through binoculars at the cordoned-off Führerbunker. Schneider is rather blasé about World War II and depicts most Germans as unconcerned with the politicians' passion about re-unification. Schneider uses the striking image of lovers not hurt by a breakup so much as sad about lost enthusiasm. Giving the Narrator an ex-lover at the end of the chapter makes this more poignant. The nature of the relationship and break-up is analyzed going forward.

After sketching several minor characters to provide color, including Wolf Biermann, a historic figure, one of several whom Schneider weaves in seamlessly with fictional characters, the Narrator introduces a major character, Robert, a writer who has moved to West Berlin after being forbidden to publish in the East. Robert resents being called "typically DDR" (pg. 21), but acts the role. He refuses to embrace the political entity in which he lives, using a pointed sexual reference. Another example of how the two sides pull at each other's people is Gerhard Schlater, who eventually moves East permanently. The Narrator confides to Robert that he is compiling stories about interesting characters in the two Berlins. Robert shares with him the story Kabe, the apparent record-holder for jumping the Wall (15 times), surprisingly in the wrong direction: West-to-East. Both sides want to declare Kabe insane but cannot find grounds. The unemployed Kabe lives off them both. His case illustrates the foolishness of the West German insistence that the DDR is not a state. The bureaucratic frustration is delicious.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Traveling the S-Bahn into East Berlin confirms the Narrator's observations about the grayness of the East. Exiting at Friedrichstrasse, he finds it odd that a border guard focuses intently on his ear and is struck by the enthusiasm with which children celebrate a political holiday while the adults stand closed-faced. Decades earlier, he watches the scrolling headlines on the terminal's exterior as she and Lena are bound to visit her family for the first time since the Wall divides them. It is marked by falsely elevated emotions, as are all such encounters. Her nearly-blind mother and bourgeois older sister worry about life being livable in the West. Lena finds uncommon peace in the generations-old house that politics has never touched. She laughs and shares catchwords and songs. Her family treats her as one whose freedom has cost a great deal. The Narrator considers that the West's government is far more intrusive on citizens' privacy. East Germans living in the West cling together. Lena has two inseparable female friends who in style stand out from the rest of society.

The Narrator catches a cab from the station. The driver finds himself amusing, commenting on the parade and the no-joke life of the West. Wondering why the VW insignia has been removed from all cars, the Narrator realizes that Robert is right: he is not an unbiased observer. Pommerer tells about two Eastern boys each named Willy who observe that guards along the Wall are predictable and unobservant. Joined by an older friend, Lutz, they jump to the West, see a film, and sneak home undetected. They do this 12 Fridays before being stopped by a West Berlin patrol. Western reporters' coverage of the story gets the Willys arrested and sent to the army and youth camp, while Lutz heads West to become a lumberjack.

Walking home, Pommerer mentions the sealed-off underground stations and wonders what it would be like to ride to the West. Arriving at midnight, the Narrator is surprised to see welders working at window-level. In the morning, he and a crane operator ape one another. The Narrator begins writing in a new notebook. He imagines Kabe and Lutz converging on the Wall from opposite directions in a dense fog and embracing atop it. The Willys join them for a brief chat about technical difficulties, like climbing teams atop K2. The early-1960s saw innovative escapes like tightrope walking and pole vaulting. The DDR has suppressed sports that aid escape, like scuba diving and ballooning, but people innovate equipment to achieve their goal. It presents the same challenge as mountain climbing. As they watch a border guard raking sand, Pommerer assures the Narrator that one could escape in Center City, as there are no land mines. He does not want to leave but is obsessed with figuring out how he could.

Sunday morning, Pommerer drives the Narrator out of the gray city to visit friends. For the first six miles choking lime dust falls, snow-like, before they pass into summer greenery. They pass through two-story towns displaying banners that exhort the people to pull together or love the Soviets. The Narrator wonders how people think about things

that must be so continually stated. Western publicity folk know to avoid self-praise. The friends have settled in abandoned farm cottages. An enormous TV antenna stands out in the surroundings. Neighbors gather to study the Westerner and talk about art and literature with the air of conspiracy as they wryly comment on the vaguely political. They shun successful writers in favor of those who struggle against publishers and Party. They talk about being censored and controlled to serve the ends of making readers feel good about socialism. Having no comparable gripes and not wanting to appear naïve by suggesting they simply leave the DDR, the Narrator stays silent.

The artists criticize a scientist who has lost the privilege of going abroad by brashly breaking the rules in the travel directive about contact with others. Such rules do not apply to writers abroad; the state police have tailored rules to each group of intellectuals. When speaking in Cologne, Biermann had challenged the State rather than outsmarting it, and his colleagues had criticized this risk-taking even while loudly protesting his exile. They hate being shown that they are putting up with tyranny. The Narrator grows bored, hearing each anecdote repeated three times to accommodate new arrivals.

Back home, Pommerer is visited by a woman with slightly-bulging eyeballs who joins every committee that supports solidarity. The Narrator has already met the crusader against oppression in West Berlin. He finds her more relaxed in the East, catching her breath among sympathetic hearers, but still she plays the victim. She counters every story of Eastern horrors with worse situations in the West. Like all progressive visitors from the West, she destroys the illusions set up by the Western media, to help Eastern friends accept their lot. It matters nothing that this distorts reality. The Narrator notes that this visitor's talk fills a need in Pommerer, who resents having his resignation to life judged by the Narrator. They had argued days before about whether a document from the "Commission on Order and Security" mandating reporting suspicious activity is the same as was required under Nazism.

DDR-TV and a Western station report on a Central American liberation movement from opposite sides, showing different scenes and quoting different sources. Both are probably true, but each is tailored for what the station manager believes. Pommerer claims that the West continues to be controlled by the same old reactionaries dressed up as democrats, while the East is ruled by true sons of the poor working class. The Narrator insists that referring always to the past does nothing to build a new Germany. Pommerer insists that the new order deserves time to mature, just like capitalism had. The Narrator deplores "canned language" (pg. 72) but believes that if government, press, and police on both sides took a vacation, Germans would soon be seen to resemble the forms that come out of the postwar occupation. They are two-dimensional TV figures.

The friends take in a loud evening of jazz at the Hall of Young Talent, formerly the Prussian royal family's mansion. The music expresses a rebelliousness that cannot safely be put in words. They see a graffito that, amazingly, reaches five letters before being over-painted (the artist having been arrested). Pommerer drops the Narrator at the Friedrichstrasse station.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 takes place in East Berlin. After the Wall goes up the S-Bahn subway system in the East has most of its stops shut down, leaving Friedrichstrasse as the only check point. The Narrator again comments on the grayness of the East and is amused that a border guard studies his ear closely and links this to a recent event: the kidnapping of Paul Getty, III, whose ear is severed and sent to his billionaire grandfather to change his mind about withholding ransom money. The ear becomes a minor motif going forward, as does seeing the East in clear sunlight instead of grayness.

Lena is mentioned again, in the context of recalling the days soon after the Wall goes up and separated families deal with the growing differences between members. The Narrator notes that reunions are still marked by falsely elevated emotions and private codes. Later in his visit, the Narrator sees how intellectuals have adopted stylized ways of communicating things that cannot be said openly and criticize those among their members who dare step out of bounds.

The Narrator's friend Pommerer is introduced and he promptly tells a wall-jumping story. In the course of relating it to his audience, the Narrator notes why the methodology cannot be literally true and believes that retelling it has built up legendary elements. The aside is useful for getting into the book statistics on the Wall's construction and salient features. Pommerer's story tells of two Eastern boys each named Willy who observed that guards are predictable and unobservant. A friend, Lutz, a movie fan, convinces them to use this knowledge to jump to the West, see a film, and sneak home undetected. When captured after 12 forays, they insist that they are not refugees but simply movie fans and do not want to defect. The press cannot accept this and its coverage alerts Eastern authorities and brings age-appropriate punishment. Later in the chapter, the Narrator conflates this story with Kabe's, going the other direction, and suggests that they, like mountain climbers, simply jump because the Wall is there. K2 is the world's second tallest mountain, located in the Himalayas.

Note that because written materials may not cross the border, the Narrator must buy himself a new notebook to take notes in the East. Construction outside Pommerer's window allows him to quip that the West gilds while the East builds. The East is obscuring all view of the West, symbolized by a news ticker on a prominent building. The blue light of welding at the level of his apartment contributes to disorientation caused by an evening of drinking. Talking about the three jumpers, Pommerer is confident that he has learned how to cross the border safely through telescopic observations, even though he has no desire to do so. It is an intellectual quest that seems widespread.

The Narrator's first visit to the DDR includes a trip to the countryside to meet Pommerer's artist friends and develop the theme of troublesome people being exiled. Biermann returns to the story, being said to have foolishly challenged the State rather than outsmarting it. This is an opportunity to discuss how various groups of intellectuals are controlled. The role of art in socialist states is discussed and some typically lame

examples of anti-Soviet humor given. The Narrator's discomfort, listening to such stories, is matched back at Pommerer's flat as he is visited by an anonymous woman of conscience who feels obliged everywhere she goes to counter the Western media's obsession with the shortcomings of socialism to point out even more striking Western problems. An example is automobiles: inaccessible in the East and polluting in the West. Easterners resent being judged for resigning their lives to reality. Both societies use the kind of denunciations that marked the Nazi era.

How the media in the two societies shape news reporting is revisited, this time in the context of Central American liberation. The Narrator admits that both broadcasts are probably true although highly selective. The friends debate how society should be governed, couching their arguments in clichés and looking back to outdated historical arguments. It is suggested that the two societies are set in a TV-like two-dimensionality that can no longer be remedied. It has become an integral part of both German peoples.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Back in West Berlin, the Narrator wants to drive fast, order drinks late, and otherwise enjoy decadent pleasures. While tending to every detail in her busy bar, Esther tells the Narrator about having to choose between Marlow or Bill for sex. Later, the Narrator tells an impresario about his trip to the East and is amazed to hear the man say it is more fascist-like there than in West Berlin. Even dissidents there do not want the Western social system.

Urban renovation finally reaches the Narrator's block and facades are all torn up. He sees a fifty-something blonde diva a in a long gown trying to find the key to his neighbor's apartment. Claiming to be Frieda Loch, it is clearly he. Robert cannot be reached by phone for 20 minutes. He is getting car dealers to show him the latest Western models, demanding impossible combinations of features. He likes the explicit rules of early capitalism. The Narrator goes along on two failed demonstrations. Robert shows no curiosity about what the Narrator might have been doing, but treats him as part of the close-knit family. "Show no surprise" (pg. 82) seems to be Robert's defense against worry. He has a fixed daily routine. Having heard about the three jumpers, Robert tells the story of Walter Bolle's single-handed war against the DDR.

A repeat offender of the DDR's border restrictions, Bolle spends seven years in prison before being ransomed by the BRD in 1973 for DM 50,000. He immediately offers his services to the U.S. Army for counterintelligence, is turned down, and settles in the South, where he tires of being a metalworker. When he can find nowhere else to serve, Bolle joins the French Foreign Legion and is stationed in Corsica. Having honed his skills in sabotage and heavy weapons, Bolle deserts. Back in West Germany he finds no one willing to join his plot to destroy the Wall, so he jumps it and tells the DDR guards that he wants to return home.

Told that he must perform counterintelligence in the West to earn the right that he has earlier forfeited, Bolle eagerly agrees, planning all along to betray DDR officials to U.S. authorities. He infiltrates the BRD via the so-called Ho-Chi-Minh Trail, revisits all of his earlier haunts, gathering data and photographs to present to his handlers. Satisfied with his mission, the Stasi hire him as a full-time agent and return him to the West. There, Bolle informs the BRD political police of his activities, which are intended only to gain credence him and in the West and backing for his ultimate plan. His description of his Stasi superior and Wester superiors closely matches each other, except in the quality of dental work and wristwatches.

That he is not arrested but allowed to go back through the Ho-Chi-Minh Trail suggests that Bolle becomes a double agent. He pushes to radicalize an ad hoc committee protesting the Wall but is kept by its suspicious leader from taking an active role. Both intelligence agencies take note of the illegal radio transmitter that Bolle erects in his

Kreuzberg garret to preach war against the Wall. He utilizes the cartoon-like images that each side has of the other and double-crosses both with conviction. Realizing that both sides are biding their time, Bolle returns to the Americans, who consider him over a spy. A West Berlin court declares him a confused, lost soul but is gives him only a ten-month sentence. Bolle subsequently disappears.

As lights go on along the Kurfürstendamm, a stranger warns Robert and the Narrator to leave the café before violence breaks out to protest the death by starvation of someone in prison. Robert refuses to join the mass exodus. Thirty masked young people stroll down the street and pass out stones to demonstrators, most of whom are too puny to smash the reinforced glass of storefronts. The horde moves on, leaving alarms shrieking. It reminds the Narrator of the Germanic tribes overwhelming the collapsing Roman Empire. Robert informs the Narrator that the police have not been taken by surprise; they are behind this, to prevent a build-up of popular resentment lest a prisoner ever die in police custody. To think it spontaneous is naïve. The friends fight verbally about a misquote from Hegel and paranoia and nearly come to blows.

This often happens when they watch news reports together; they always take opposite sides on what is being purported. Robert always sees hidden motives behind events; free choice is a fairy tale for those who choose not to know better. Blame always falls outside Robert, while the Narrator always finds fault with himself on the basis of Western free will. This is the more useful delusion on the Western side of the Wall. As they part at dawn, Robert declares that they are both too cautious and too careless with one another. He dislikes how readily the Narrator labels him. A few hours later, Robert will forget the fight and phone. The Narrator clings to his worries about having his mental processes controlled.

The Narrator is first attracted to the rigor and vulnerability in Lena's face and a laughter that he cannot share. Growing up in Mecklenburg, watching young Soviet soldiers exercise outside their barracks, Lena picks up poignant Russian songs and reads Chekhov and Dostoevsky. She is seduced by a Red Army pilot who abandons her. At Italian count wants to marry her but dies in an accident, and another lover remains a stalker long after she and the Narrator are living together.

Lena wishes that the past were pure and simple—and believes it into being so. She needs to be accepted and never wants to be more than an arm's length from the Narrator when they are together. Lena feels utterly out of place living in the West, where people take nothing seriously. Rather childlike, she takes everything literally and is easily disillusioned. She is defiant and aggressive and refuses to acknowledge that there is anything she does not know or understand. She judges based on expressions, gestures, and the flaws that she always finds in people. She sees everyone as part of a conspiracy to repress and exploit.

Lena interprets the Narrator's every independent step as an attempt to escape her. At first he tries to explain how her suspicions are without foundation and then changes to making them come true. He lets her be vulnerable. If he plays down her fears she considers him an accomplice. Figurative language and irony offend her; she demands

precision and consistency and is disgusted by the superfluous. All of this betrays a State education. Her first quarrels with the Narrator are about evaluating perceptions. Lena sees details that the Narrator misses. When he cannot stand causing her pain by challenging her views, he conforms to them and shrinks from the world.

Trying to reach Pommerer by phone, the Narrator repeatedly hears bits of a conversation between two women concerning their ridiculous men, Ulli and Stefan and Andreas' accident. They suspect someone is on the line. Finally the call goes through, with the characteristic noise of the DDR phone system.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The third chapter returns to West Berlin to explore contrasts to things the Narrator has just seen. It also develops the characters of Robert and Lena to help typify the fruits of an Eastern State education. The story opens with an anonymous drinker in a bar, claiming that East Berlin is more fascist than West Berlin. The Narrator maintains that even dissidents there do not want the Western social system. Another bar scene is incorporated later in the chapter. Urban renovation, just seen from Pommerer's window, reaches the Narrator's block, rather less dramatically. It allows the seemingly serene but colorful neighbor introduced in Chapter 1 to reappear in drag, trying to find his door key. He returns later in the book.

Robert's character is developed a bit, but his reappearance serves largely to provide the Narrator another story about a jumper. Robert is shown looking at cars that he cannot afford, which facilitates a short discussion of the virtues of impossible socialism and primitive capitalism. Robert is shown never asking about the Narrator's life, fixed to a daily routine, and never admitting surprise. Walter Bolle, the subject of Robert's long, entertaining, Keystone Kops kind of story, wants to head a vendetta against the DDR but can arouse no interest among West Germans or Americans. He is followed, frustration by frustration, until he is established as a double agent for the two German security services, which are shown resembling one another down to the tiniest details. The Eastern operatives have cheaper dental work and wrist watches, however. Bolle simply withers away.

Robert and the Narrator then witness a rock-throwing protest and enter into one of the arguments that the Narrator has said typify their relationship. Tipped that violence is on its way to the café in which they sit, Robert refuses to leave, saying that the mob will attack the luxury stores on either side and then stop in for a beer to relax. The demonstration is played for comic aspects (strong glass, weak-armed students) and the Narrator again muses about what the Teutonic hordes invading Roman territory must have been like. Burglar alarms join in a kind of symphony. Robert sets the naïve Narrator straight that the police are behind this seemingly spontaneous riot, in order to defuse the power of rumors. Having overreacted to a false rumor, young people will be slower to react when the State might have done something worth protesting. The Narrator muses on how rapid the police response would have been in East Berlin.

The Narrator catches Robert humorously having the 18th-century philosopher Hegel talking about the World War II figure, Quisling. Displaying full macho behavior, they nearly come to blows. This brings the story back around to contrasting news reports from Western and Eastern media. The friends always take opposite sides on what is being purported. In the Narrator's mind, Robert always sees hidden motives behind events and never has to internalize blame as he does. Finding fault with oneself, the Narrator muses, is the essence of Western free will. Before they part, Robert decries how the Narrator constantly labels him as determined by his DDR upbringing. declares that they are both too cautious and too careless with one another. He dislikes how readily the Narrator labels him.

The effect of such an upbringing is next examined in the person of Lena. The Narrator sketches her youth in the Eastern sector, including incidents that leave her deeply insecure. She is childlike in her innocence, defiant, aggressive, and paranoid. When the Narrator cannot show her alternatives to her perceptions, he reluctantly conforms to them. The fact that he is no longer with Lena (but longs to have sex with her) shows that he at some point breaks the emotional shackles, which he so carefully describes here. This must be resolved going forward.

The chapter ends rather comically with the Narrator trying to phone Pommerer but not being able to get in all ten digits before a line is opened. He overhears rather insignificant conversations, feels guilty but intrigued, and eventually gets through to Pommerer in the East. As success comes, he hears the noise characteristic of the DDR phone system.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The best time to cross the border at Heinrich Heine Strasse is 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m. when the checkpoint is nearly empty. There is only one traveler, a nervous man with a dog on a leash. The guard keeps him waiting on purpose. The ritual of control is obvious. In the DDR everything is about authorization. The Narrator obeys them all, paying fees and exchanging currency, and takes a seat beside the man in silence. The officer disappears to a shed and returns to slap the man's paperwork loudly and call his number. When the dog barks, the officer barks back into the microphone, to mask his fright. Neither yields until the owner pulls the leash. The officer roars in victorious laughter and passes them through. The Narrator's turn comes. He is carrying copies of his own writings, which is permitted.

Pommerer suspects his phone troubles are linked to his joining a protest against a heavy fine levied on and expulsion from the Union of a fellow writer who publishes something in the West without permission. After protesting Biermann's exile, the group fears that it cannot be spontaneous for years to come. In Pommerer's favorite bar the Narrator complains how his stories are all missing something. After hearing Bolle's tale, Pommerer relates the story of Michael Gartenschläger, arrested for treason at age 17, and ransomed for DM 45,000 by the BRD.

Gartenschläger cannot adjust to life in Hamburg and looks for ways to get even with the DDR. He is inspired by a newspaper story about how the DDR has since 1971 deployed 22,000 sensitive self-triggering robots along the border that spray at would-be escapees up to 80 feet away projectiles that inflict wounds as serious as dum-dum bullets. The West has never seen the mechanism. Gartenschläger takes obtaining one as a personal challenge. He and an assistant to go Büchen in Lower Saxony, spread powder to distract DDR dogs, and study the patrols. At 2:00 a.m. Gartenschläger climbs up and removes a "comrade," only by luck snipping the wire that does not cause detonation.

He sells the robot for DM 12,000 to a news magazine and becomes famous in the West. The units are said to derive from ones designed for Nazi concentration camp fences, stolen by the Soviets, provided to the DDR secret police, and further refined. Meanwhile, Gartenschläger removes another robot but is arrested for theft. Undeterred, he sets out to steal another to attach to the flagpole at the DDR mission in Bonn. Friends try to prevent him, but he returns to specially-reinforced Büchen, where he is killed.

A stranger dressed in black leather, open shirt, and gold chains invites himself to Pommerer and the Narrator's table and buys a round of drinks. A shipping clerk, he has been demoted as a trouble maker as low as he can go. He wants Pommerer to join his plant. Pommerer asks him to leave. Ignoring this, the man talks about Butterfly, his co-worker in a television plant, who is caught stealing units and is found to have Western

currency in his apartment, which he claims to collect from the Alexanderplaz water fountain. No one believes his story but the plant psychiatrist, a beautiful woman whom he favors, gets him to admit that he wants to be ambassador to China. He is locked up as insane.

The leather-jacketed storyteller protests loudly, is himself investigated, and is found to have posted pro-Western graffiti on the walls. Harassment of him ends only when he produces documentation of his eternal loyalty to the DDR and friendship with the Soviet Union. Eastern officials are gullible, spending so much time lying that they cannot be trusted when they tell the truth and blinding themselves to bad conditions by claiming that all is well. When the man is gone, Pommerer claims that East Germans are "more committed, more serious, hungrier" (pg. 117) that Westerners. The Narrator observes that this generalization cannot be proven and realizes that as an intellectual Pommerer has little contact with true workers.

Next day, Pommerer and the Narrator watch news reports of strikes in Poland, with the Eastern press quoting Pravda about Western provocation and the West quoting exclusively from the Polish Solidarity Union. Network executives are alike in showing only what they choose to emphasize. They next watch a West German documentary on the partition, using colorized stock film to heighten drama. Pommerer is angry that reconstruction of East Berlin after the war takes ten times longer than in the West, thanks to Soviet looting of resources. He adds that the DDR leadership is Communist because they had been the only non-Nazis with clean records. Social Democrats and Christians had turned down the posts. Pommerer sees nothing important about the Communists getting only 20% of the vote in the 1946 elections. Democracy is not a home-grown German system; Hitler had won by a landslide. Is imposed capitalism or imposed communism better?

It will take less time some day to remove the Wall than the division between Eastern and Western ways of thinking. Pommerer and the Narrator instinctively parrot the slogans of the regimes under which they live. Cross-border reunions of Germans suffer the same fate: each side must recite its credo before conversations can begin. Pommerer in 1945 lives in a bunker and comes up for an hour to cook. His father has left a pistol to kill the family before the Russians arrive to rape them all. Pommerer remembers only Russians and Mongols helping them survive, even though 15,000 of them fall at the spot where the Soviet Memorial now stands. That same 1945, the Narrator and his mother are in Bavaria, fleeing the Russians. The Americans arrive to distribute food and supplies. They are rich and generous. They do not rape; they have love affairs. Pommerer learns, "Ami, go home," while the Narrator learns, "Have you chewing gum?" Now, 35 years later, defense budgets are based on whether one believes the Soviets want to rule the world or whether, having lost so many people they want peace.

The Narrator visits his Aunt Dora (pseudonym for her safety) on a wooded hill in Dresden. Her privately-owned three-story villa is furnished in nostalgic middle-class style. As they have never met, Dora is cautious about her Western relative. Her late husband, a brilliant mining executive, had been equally vital to Nazis and Communists,

and the latter had never thought of inconvenienced him about maintaining friendships in West Berlin. Political conviction is beneath them all; it is a "luxury of the underprivileged" (pg. 123). As Dora's story unfolds, the Narrator wonders about soft footsteps upstairs. Dora reveals that that is her son, a soldier in the National People's Army. They are forbidden contact with Westerners without special permission, and the Narrator's visit had been announced too late.

The Narrator is amazed that he obeys when no one could have turned him in. He wonders if he would rebel, if he were in his cousin's shoes. He wonders at what point he might have rebelled against Eastern compulsion had he grown up in the DDR, influenced by Russian propaganda, reading Nietzsche and Sartre in secret instead of Wilhelm Reich, Lenin, and Marx, as he had, influenced by the student movement. Would he be a different person from what he is, had his formative influences been different? Would he even be recognizable? Where does the State end and the self begin? If one "finally" (pg. 126) becomes someone again, does this mean s/he previous is nothing?

Pommerer's reaction is: so what? He raises several areas in which Western German rights are curtailed, a typical reaction among Germans. The Narrator is ten years older than the two German states. Therefore, neither can logically be his fatherland, and each is only part of his fatherland. He identifies with a people who speaks German The mother tongue is stronger than politics. Deutsch originally means "of the people" (pg. 127) as tribes unify against Latin. It survives three unholy reichs and still stands at odds to the the power talk of East and West. As the Narrator leaves, Pommerer asks him to look into an apartment Adenauerplatz. As an exiled writer, he may need it.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 takes the Narrator back into East Berlin, offering him the opportunity to detail the indignities that are built into a border crossing. A DDR officer engages in a barking contest with a traveler's dog. This time the Narrator gets through; in the final chapter he will be denied for no reason. The red tape that he describes makes this no surprise.

He finds Pommerer in trouble with the Writers' Union for defending a colleague who publishes something in the West without permission. The chapter ends with him asking the Narrator to look into an apartment for him, just in case. After hearing disinterestedly Bolle's tale, Pommerer relates the story of Michael Gartenschläger, a young never-do-well in the East who gets ransomed by the BRD and cannot adjust. This motif has already been encountered. Gartenschläger learns about a lethal weapon system to prevent escapes to the East. Pommerer includes detail about how it is developed by the Nazis to keep people in the concentration camps, stolen by the Soviets (along with everything else useful, it is suggested in the book), brought back to the DDR, and perfected. The killing power is rather downplayed unless one realizes that "dum-dum" bullets flatten out on impact to inflict larger-than-normal wounds. Gartenschläger sets a goal of bringing one to the West for study. He sells it to a news magazine rather than

giving it to the BRD military, and becomes famous. He is arrested on returning from his second foray and killed on his third. The story is full of intrigue.

A mysterious stranger is then introduced, who talks about defending a co-worker caught stealing televisions and is found to have Western currency in his apartment. He explains that West German coins, being attracted to magnets, are easily separated from Eastern ones in water fountains, where tourists throw them. No one one believes his story and he is locked up. The storyteller is harassed for protesting this, much like Pommerer expects to be for his speaking out for the fallen writer, but he is surprisingly left in peace after declaring happiness at living in the wonderful DDR. He says cynically that Eastern officials are gullible and the system does not allow truthfulness. When Pommerer claims the moral superiority of East Germans, the Narrator rejects such generalizations and perceives the inevitable gap between intellectuals and workers.

Strikes in Poland allow the examination of Eastern and Western media biases to be revisited, followed by a debate over postwar reconstruction and government. Pommerer sees Communist rule in the East as inevitable because they alone have clean anti-Nazi records. Pommerer insists that democracy is not a German invention and in the case of Hitler it had failed badly. The choice is really between ideologies imposed from outside. This segues into a discussion of ways of thinking East and West. The Wall will fall and be carted off faster. This striking image, realized years after the book is written, hearkens back to predictions that cleaning up the rubble of bombed out Berlin would take decades. In the West it is done swiftly because the Allies are helpful. In the East it lags because the Soviets loot. The effect has been clear throughout the book.

Pommerer and the Narrator's situations in 1945 are contrasted to bolster this point. Germans universally fear falling into the hands of the Russians and their Mongol hordes, inferior who have paid a high price in blood and are surely out to rape and kill. Pommerer in Berlin remembers them as scrounging anxiously to help survivors stay alive. Meanwhile in Bavaria, the Narrator meets rich generous Americans who distribute food and supplies and need not rape when they can arrange love affairs. The Narrator wonders whether, 35 years later, the Soviets want to rule the world or, having lost so many people, just want peace.

The chapter concludes with a visit by the Narrator to a maternal aunt whom he has never met. She is a member of the upper-middle-class that flourishes both under the Nazis and the Communists. He late husband is a prized technocrat and retains friendships with Westerners without State opposition and without questions of political persuasion coming between them. Earlier, the Narrator describes yet again how divided families feel obliged during reunions to parrot the party lines before getting down to visiting. Hearing his cousin hidden upstairs, forbidden by the army to meet a foreigner, the Narrator launches into a lengthy meditation on how he might be different had he grown up in the DDR. The perceptions on each side and means of rebelling are told with a light-hearted innocence, leaving in the end the question of where the State ends and the self begins. This has been a recurring theme throughout the book. This in turn segues into a consideration of how the German language alone keeps the people one. It has always defined Germans against outsiders and must still.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Robert is not expecting the Narrator at Charlie's as he sits, talking with Lena. She is beautiful, thin, tanned, but stern and suspicious to see him. Internally, he tells her about visiting her old home, seeing how growing up in that environment effects people, making them reproachful of outsiders. He will not apologize for having enjoyed small comforts, thanks to the Marshall Plan. He is glad that he no longer has to be sorry for everything he likes and she does not. She is an aggressor, not a victim. Lena interrupts by asking a simple question and receives a jumpy, defensive answer. She and Robert are clearly involved.

When Lena leaves, Robert asks why the Narrator has kept her a secret and awaits no answer before focusing on a Soviet-American hockey game. Players and fans are both affected by the tension of military actions in Afghanistan and El Salvador. The friends argue about a disputed goal. Back home, the Narrator again encounters Frieda Loch, searching for her keys. His flashlight does not help and he resents how long Loch takes to climb off his hands as he lifts her/him to the window. Loch also gives a lewd giggle. The restorers are removing traces of old bullet holes as they tear down plaster. The Narrator listens to them debating whether DDR soccer players will take the gold medal. They bet a case of beer. One claims they only have a chance in swimming, where it is entirely about individual drillwork. The Russians will forbid them winning

Back at Heine Hesse Strasse, the Narrator is the only one in line to cross the border, but must anyways endure the wait. The guard knows him and is almost chatty. Armed with a screwdriver, a customs man begins dismantling the Narrator's Citroen. The Narrator lends a hand, hoping to speed it up and prevent damage. They talk about methods of finding contraband and the Narrator gets so smart-alecky that he has his fees refunded and is banned from the DDR without explanation or duration.

The Narrator finds that when he awakens in the dark during the winter he is startled and fearful of some recent parting. It passes when he turns on the light. The normal sounds of life take over and all of his belongings are intact. He is more durable than most of his belongings, but the structures of the city outside will outlive everyone alive.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The brief final chapter wraps up strings. Robert and Lena meet, to the Narrator's knowledge for the first time, but evidently are already involved. The Narrator holds an internal conversation with her, telling her that he is done apologizing for everything. When she attempts an innocent conversation, he balks. Robert and the Narrator next differ over who will win a Soviet-American hockey game. They like the players and fans are caught up in international politics. The U.S. is not sending a team to the Summer

Olympics to protest the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Back home, the Narrator hears construction workers debating the DDR's Olympic chances with the Americans gone. One says that the Soviets will forbid them to outperform them. The story ends with the Narrator talking amiably with a border guard searching his car for contraband. The Narrator evidently gets too bold, for he is banned. The spirited and seemingly inoffensive exchanges cap the theme of arbitrary abuse of power.

The last paragraphs are enigmatic. The Narrator seems fearful of loss or change, but realizes that he is likely to outlast most of his meager belongings. Berlin with its various kinds of walls depicted throughout the book will outlive everyone alive, however. Presumably the politics of power and competition will thus come to an end.

Characters

The Narrator

Born in the South German provinces of the BRD, the Narrator, who keeps his name carefully secret, has lived in the Wilmersdorf section of West Berlin for 20 years, drawn by the allure of a big city, a girlfriend, Lena, and an exemption from the army. The year-by-year stay becomes permanent. He lives rather spartanly in an apartment house built ca. 1900, whose outer walls are still marked by bullet holes from either the 1920s or World War II. The ground floor front apartments are leased to bars serving very different but equally destructive clientèles. The Narrator cannot differentiate the garbage thrown out by the owners, one German and the other Bolivian. It dissuades him from visiting either establishment. He meets few fellow tenants, but knows them by the noise they make. One is an ancient violinist whose repertoire the Narrator likes. When he dies, the Narrator endures the other noises around him.

The Narrator regularly plays pinball with his writer friend Richard, whom he tells about his project of collecting stories from East Berlin. He cannot help seeing his friend as a typical product of the DDR. Robert is comfortable only as a "boundary-walker" (pg. 23) between the two political systems. He provides the Narrator several stories about Wall jumpers. Another friend in East Berlin, Pommerer, provides the same service. The Narrator has been having trouble getting his stories to turn out right and begins collecting such stories.

The Narrator admits to prejudices against the fascism of the BRD and the complacency of East Berliners toward their lack of freedom. He and his two friends, who consider him naive, often argue. The Narrator has broken up with Lena, whom he considers a typical Easterner, unable to accommodate to life in the West. Her obsessive fears lead him to rebellious behavior and, curiously, for a while to adopting her point of view. At their last chance meeting in a bar, he longs for her but mentally declares his independence from her control. He cannot speak to her rationally in real life. As the book ends, the Narrator wakes up fearful of change, but realizes that Berlin with all of its kinds of walls will outlive everyone alive.

Pommerer

The Narrator's close friend in East Berlin and the source of a number of stories about Wall jumpers, Pommerer lives with a precocious young son in an 11th-floor apartment. His doorbell does not ring; one must knock. There is major construction in the area on the Eastern side of the Wall. Pommerer's study overlooks an enormous construction pit. A growing apartment building threatens to obscure the view.

In the evening, Pommerer and the Narrator wander around dark, oddly-empty Center City, where all of the streets dead-end because of the Wall. Pommerer comments on

"anti-imperialist architecture" (pg. 46) that has obscured the news headlines displayed on the Springer Building in West Berlin. It has wrecked the neighborhood, but graffiti artists are always caught in the act and punished severely. Pommerer's favorite bar is closed, but the bouncer at a hotel bar knows him and lets them in, despite Pommerer's hippie clothes. He is sick of bars closing early and playing the same music.

Having heard the Narrator's story of Schalter, which blends with Kabe's, Pommerer tells him about the three moviegoers. As they watch through binoculars a border guard raking sand, Pommerer assures the Narrator that one could escape in Center City, as there are no land mines. He does not want to leave, but is obsessed with figuring out how he could. Pommerer shares with the Narrator the story of Michael Gartenschläger, who dies after two successful attempts at stealing lethal East German border robots. Pommerer claims that East Germans are "more committed, more serious, hungrier" (pg. 117) that Westerners. The Narrator observes that this generalization cannot be proven and realizes that as an intellectual Pommerer has little contact with true workers.

During the Narrator's last visit to East Berlin, Pommerer confides that he is in trouble with the Writers' Union for defending a fellow writer who has broken the rules while touring the West. He fears that he will be blackballed and asks the Narrator to look into an apartment for him in the West.

Lena

The woman with whom the Narrator shares an apartment in the Schöneberg section of Berlin, Lena is, after the break-up, terse. When they speak they talk each other further apart. The Narrator sees Lena in a dream in which he falls overboard from a boat before he can touch her. In real life, he phones her in the morning, says that he has dreamed about her, and asks to see her. She is busy packing for a trip.

The Narrator recalls accompanying Lena on her first visit to relatives after being separated by the Wall. It is marked by falsely elevated emotions, as are all such encounters. Her mother is nearly blind and worried about her wayward daughter; her older sister is a doctor, living the bourgeois life that Lena rejects. Lena finds a peace among them that the Narrator cannot bring out of her in West Berlin. She laughs authentically and shares catchwords and songs with her sisters. Her family treats her as one whose freedom has cost a great deal. They hope that life is livable in the West. The Narrator sees that Lena needs to put down roots in society as a whole rather than find peace with any one person. Lena has two inseparable female friends who in style stand out from the rest of society.

The Narrator is first attracted to the rigor and vulnerability in Lena's face and a laughter that he cannot share. Growing up in Mecklenburg, watching young Soviet soldiers work out outside their barracks, Lena picks up poignant Russian songs and reads Chekhov and Dostoevsky. She is seduced by a Red Army pilot who abandons her. At Italian count wants to marry her but dies in an accident. Another lover continues stalking her long after she and the Narrator are living together. Lena wishes that the past were pure and

simple—and believes it into being so. She needs to be accepted and never wants to be more than an arm's length from the Narrator when they are together. Lena feels utterly out of place living in the West, where people take nothing seriously.

Childlike Lena takes everything literally and is easily disillusioned. She is defiant and aggressive and refuses to acknowledge that there is anything she does not know or understand. She judges based on expressions, gestures, and the flaws that she always finds in people. She sees everyone as part of a conspiracy to repress and exploit. She interprets the Narrator's every independent step as an attempt to escape from her. At first he tries to explain how her suspicions are without foundation and then changes to making them come true. He lets her be vulnerable. If he plays down her fears she considers him an accomplice. Figurative language and irony offend her; she demands precision and consistency and is disgusted by the superfluous. All of this betrays a State education. Her first quarrels with the Narrator are about evaluating perceptions. Lena sees details that the Narrator misses. When he cannot stand causing her pain by challenging her views, he conforms to them and shrinks from the world.

Lena is last seen in a bar with the Narrator's friend Robert, who later asks why the Narrator has kept her hidden. The Narrator in his mind sets Lena straight on her attitude problems and refuses to be bossed around any more, but can say nothing to her aloud.

Robert

The Narrator's West German friend and the source of several tales of jumping the wall, Robert is a former East Berlin writer who, forbidden to publish in the DDR, moves to West Berlin. He has a persistent gaze and eyes that occasionally flash. He and the Narrator live near one another, often meet for breakfast or coffee, and frequently at Charlie's in the evening to play pinball. Robert regularly wins. He has a fixed daily routine. He shows no curiosity about what the Narrator might have been doing, but treats him as part of his close-knit family. "Show no surprise" (pg. 82) seems to be Robert's defense against worry.

Robert denies that the "German question" exists, but is visibly marked by the effects of partition. He refuses to embrace the Western life-style and is shocked that West Germans are ignorant about those in the East. He and the Narrator inevitably take opposite positions on any political or historical matter. Robert is filled with anger, which the Narrator does not share. Robert resents being called "typically DDR" (pg. 21) and prefers to emphasize his and the Narrator's similarities. Robert knows his way around West Berlin in three months better than the Narrator does in three years.

Robert has had a series of favorite drinks and is currently fond of vodka. Over vodka and beer he tells the Narrator the story of Kabe and his 15 jumps over the Wall. Having heard about the three movie-goers, Robert tells the story of Walter Bolle's single-handed war against the DDR. Robert always sees hidden motives behind events; free choice is a fairy tale for those who choose not to know better. Blame always falls outside Robert. Robert fells that he and the Narrator are both too cautious and too

careless with one another. He dislikes how readily the Narrator labels him but within hours forgives and forgets.

Wolf Biermann

A historical figure, Biermann is a controversial German poet/singer of the postwar era. He lives in an apartment on Chausseestrasse in East Berlin until his citizenship in the DDR is revoked and he moves to the West. The Narrator meets him on his first foray into East Berlin and cannot figure out why he chooses to live in the East, since Biermann sings only of its horrors and sees no future. When speaking in Cologne, Biermann had challenged the State rather than outsmarting it, and his colleagues had criticized this risk-taking even while loudly protesting his exile.

Walter Bolle

A repeat offender of the DDR's border restrictions, Bolle spends seven years in prison before being ransomed by the BRD in 1973 for DM 50,000. He immediately offers his services to the U.S. Army for counterintelligence, is turned down, and settles in the South, where he quickly tires of being a metalworker. When he can find nowhere else to serve he joins the French Foreign Legion and is stationed in Corsica. Having honed his skills in sabotage and heavy weapons, Bolle deserts.

Back in West Germany Bolle finds no one willing to join his plot to destroy the Wall, so he jumps it and tells the DDR guards that he wants to return home. He is told that he must perform counterintelligence in the West to earn the right that he has earlier forfeited. He agrees eagerly, planning to betray DDR officials to U.S. authorities. He infiltrates the BRD via the so-called Ho-Chi-Minh Trail, revisits all of his earlier haunts, gathering data and photographs for his handlers. Satisfied with his mission, they hire him as a full-time agent and return him to the West. Bolle promptly informs BRD political police of his activities, intended only to gain credence and backing for his ultimate plan.

Bolle's description of his Stasi superior closely matches his description that he give to that official of his Western contact. That he is not arrested but allowed to go back through the Ho-Chi-Minh Trail suggests that Bolle indeed becomes a double agent. He pushes to radicalize an ad hoc committee protesting the Wall and is kept by its suspicious leader from taking an active role. Both intelligence agencies take note of the illegal radio transmitter that Bolle erects in his Kreuzberg garret to preach war against the Wall. He utilizes the cartoon-like images that each side has of the other and double-crosses both with conviction.

Realizing that both sides are biding their time, Bolle returns to the Americans, who turn him over as a spy to West German authorities. He is declared a confused and lost soul but is given only a ten-month sentence. He subsequently disappears.

Butterfly

A worker in an East German television plant, Butterfly grows up in an orphanage. Nicknamed for a popular song, he is bald, toothless, and cannot attract a woman. He gets caught stealing units and is found to have Western currency in his apartment, which he claims to collect from the Alexanderplaz water fountain. No one believes his story but the plant psychiatrist, a beautiful woman whom he favors, gets him to admit that he wants to be ambassador to China. He is locked up as insane.

Butterfly's unnamed coworker, who tells the story to Pommerer and the Narrator, protests loudly, is himself investigated, and is found to have posted pro-Western graffiti on the walls. Harassment of him ends only when he produces documentation of his eternal loyalty to the DDR and friendship with the Soviet Union. Eastern officials are gullible, spending so much time lying that they cannot be trusted when they tell the truth and blinding themselves to bad conditions by claiming that all is well.

Aunt Dora

Protected from East German officials by a pseudonym Dora is the Narrator's maternal aunt, a small, vivacious widow living on a wooded hill in Dresden. Her privately-owned three-story villa is furnished in nostalgic middle-class style. As they have never met, Dora is cautious about her Western relative. Her cosmopolitan air seems not fit with the Narrator's Saxon family tree. It is not the Wall that separates the paternal and maternal sides of the family but sociology. Somehow, the maternal side has not lost its upper-middle-class privilege under socialism. Dora's late husband had prospered under both the Nazis and later the Communists, after undergoing superficial denazification. The Narrator's mother, meanwhile, had upset the family by marrying beneath her dignity.

Dora's late husband, a brilliant mining executive, had been equally vital to Nazis and Communists, and the latter had never thought of inconvenienced him about maintaining friendships in West Berlin. Political conviction is beneath them all; it is a "luxury of the underprivileged" (pg. 123). As Dora's story unfolds, the Narrator wonders about soft footsteps upstairs. Dora reveals that that is her son, a soldier in the National People's Army. They are forbidden contact with Westerners without special permission, and the Narrator's visit had been announced too late.

Michael Gartenschläger

The hero of a story told to the Narrator by his East Berlin writer friend Pommerer, Michael Gartenschläger is 17 and living in Berlin-Straussberg when the Wall goes up. For painting anti-Ulbricht graffiti and burning down a cooperative's barn, he is given a show trial and sentenced to life in prison. In the Brandenburg Penitentiary he completes high school and becomes a lathe operator.

For ten years Gartenschläger is a thorn in the prison administrators' side before being ransomed for DM 45,000 by the BRD. He cannot adjust to life in Hamburg and looks for ways to get even with the DDR. He is inspired by a newspaper story about how the DDR has since 1971 deployed 22,000 sensitive self-triggering robots along the border that spray at would-be escapees up to 80 feet away projectiles that inflict wounds as serious as dum-dum bullets. The West has never seen the mechanism. Gartenschläger takes obtaining one as a personal challenge.

Gartenschläger and an assistant to go Büchen in Lower Saxony, spread powder to distract DDR dogs, and study the patrols. At 2:00 a.m. Gartenschläger climbs up and removes a "comrade," only by luck snipping the wire that does not cause detonation. He sells the robot for DM 12,000 to a news magazine and becomes famous in the West. The units are said to derive from ones designed for Nazi concentration camp fences, stolen by the Soviets, provided to the DDR secret police, and further refined. Meanwhile, Gartenschläger removes another robot but is arrested for theft. Undeterred, he sets out to steal another to attach to the flagpole at the DDR mission in Bonn. Friends try to prevent him, but he returns to specially-reinforced Büchen, where he is riddled with bullets.

Kabe

A West Berliner in his mid-forties and on welfare, Kabe, according to Robert's tale, jumps the Wall 15 times to the East. He uses a rubble heap and/or a VW bus as a stairway. He ignores the pleas of Western guards, drops, and is arrested by DDR police. Kabe wears out DDR interrogators who seek a motive and is sent for psychiatric evaluation in Büch.

After three months Kabe is returned home as the press on each side makes much of him. He visits Paris to continue his recuperation and then jumps again, repeatedly. Presented bills for his hospitalizations in the East, the BRD tries to commit him Havelhöhe Hospital, but lacks constitutional grounds, since the Wall officially does not exist from the BRD's point of view. The BRD relocates him in Southern Germany with relatives, but he returns to Berlin and jumps again. He claims that life is too quiet not to jump the Wall.

Frieda Loch

The Narrator's most colorful neighbor, who lives behind the trash cans of the Bolivian restaurant in his apartment building, Frieda Loch is the stage name of an elderly, dignified, always smartly-dressed man whose appearance suggests serenity and a carefree life. Late in the novel it develops that he is a cross-dressing entertainer who cannot find his key in his purse. The Narrator believes that Loch takes a bit too long being held up to his window and is uncomfortable with the leering look that Loch sends his way.

Gerhard Schalter

The Narrator's first landlord in West Berlin, Schalter is a small, smiling, optimistic Swabian (South German). He works as a hotel interior designer. The rear exit of his large but unfinished apartment lies next to the Narrator's front door. When Schalter invites the Narrator to a fancy dinner obviously planned for another guest, he offers a monologue about his frustrated affair with the wife of a powerful German television correspondent based in Africa. He goes often to the Schönefeld Airport, expecting her arrival and believes that she is being held captive. Schalter lets himself go, not shaving and dressing shabbily. He visits friends in East Berlin, works the black market, and comes to appreciate the social system of the DDR. One day, he simply moves out.

The Three Moviegoers

The Wacholt and Walz families live in an apartment building in the Prenzlauer Berg section of East Berlin, closely abutting the Wall. Each family has a son named Willy. One father dies and the other moves away with his mistress, and the boys listen more to each other than to their mothers. Through long observation, they realize that guards along the Wall are predictable in their actions and unobservant. When they inform a friend, Lutz, about this, he convinces them to jump with him and see a Charles Bronson film.

The trio steals a ride to a movie house on Kurfürstendamm, where they are turned away for lack of Western currency until the manager believes their story. After the movie, they sneak home undetected and determined to repeat the feat each coming Friday. The Narrator points out all of the technical reasons that go against the boys' story of jumping the Wall 12 times before being stopped by a West Berlin patrol. Lutz declares that they are movie fans, not refugees. Western reporters' coverage of the story gets the Willys arrested and sent to the army and youth camp, based on age. Lutz escapes to the West, where he becomes a lumberjack.

Objects/Places

Berlin

A "Siamese City," joined by culture but artificially separated by politics, culture and physically by the Wall, erected by the East German authorities in 1961, Berlin is the scene of virtually the entire book. Seen from the air, the city appears whole, but the shadow of airplanes is all that can pass freely over the fortified border. The only thing distinctive about East Berlin is its smell. Objects of everyday life look the same on the two sides, but life on the two sides is utterly different.

Those who live in Berlin take the Wall for granted and hardly notice it, while Germans living further away are obsessed by it. On Western maps the wall is a fine, pink line, whereas on Eastern ones it demarcates the end of civilization; no streets or sites are shown in West Berlin. West Berliners view the Wall as a metaphor for political freedom and a mirror on their accomplishments. What goes on in East Berlin is of little interest. What the East considers a state border, Westerners consider a tourist attraction. The Narrator considers the Wall an inconvenience. He lives in the Schöneberg section (south-central), early on sharing his apartment with Lena. It is being renovated, whereas Pommerer's neighborhood in the East is undergoing construction of high-rise buildings in part intended to block the view of the prosperous West.

When Westerners cross into the East, DDR guards ask if one is carrying guns, ammunition, printed material, or children. They delay and intimidate, but admittance is usually routine. One time, the Narrator grows too cheeky with a friendly investigator and is denied access.

Berliner Ensemble

One of the narrator's favorite destinations within East Berlin, the Berliner Ensemble is a theater company founded by Bertold Brecht after World War II to perform his and his favorite older playwrights' productions.

Büchen

Büchen is a wooded area in Saxony where Michael Gartenschläger goes to steal a deadly self-activating robot detonator that has never been studied in the West. He succeed and sells his mechanical "comrade to a West German news magazine. Stealing a second one, he is arrested but undeterred. While stealing a third from specially-reinforced Büchen, he is riddled with bullets.

Bundesrepublik Deutschland (BRD - Federal Republic of German

The BRD, with its capital in Bonn, is made up of the American, British, and French sectors of occupation following World War II. The boundary between it and the DDR is the Elbe River. In 1955, the BRD mandates the Halstein Doctrine, declaring itself the sole legitimate representative of the whole German people. This is officially superseded in 1969 by Willi Brandt's Ostpolitik, but Parliament continues debating re-unification with the East. Easterners often infer that those who govern the BRD are ex-Nazi officials. Ordinary citizens have grown bored with it all and have accepted separation, feeling little pain. West Berlin is part of the BRD, accessible by a narrow 120-mile roadway through DDR territory.

Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR - German Democratic Rep

The DDR, whose capital is the eastern half of Berlin, is made up of the Soviet sector of occupation after World War II. The boundary between it and the BRD is the Elbe River. West Germans view the DDR as a specter rather than a state and insist that re-unification with the BRD is inevitable, as the BRD is the sold on the idea that the East is a scourge on Germany, not a state. When Kabe repeatedly jumps the Wall eastward, the DDR puts him up for three-month psychiatric evaluations in Büch. Treatment is so good that he is inclined to repeat.

Criticism that Communists rule the DDR without being democratically elected is deflected by the fact that they are the only politicians not polluted by Nazism, a regime that had been tragically brought into office by a landslide. The DDR regularly allows dissidents to be ransomed by the BRD. It sets up automatic mines along the borders to kill would-be escapees, but does not install them within Berlin itself. Checkpoints into the DDR are manned by officials bent on showing that their arbitrary rule is unquestionable and delight in causing useless delays.

Dresden

Dresden is a city in East Germany whose fate during World War II is rather oddly not mentioned in the book. Rather, a three-story, privately-owned villa in the wooded outskirts is shown as a place out of time through a variety of political climates.

Friedrichstrasse Station

The main entry point into East Berlin for travelers from the West, Friedrichstrasse marks the end of the S-Bahn, the suburban transit system of the German National Railway. On his first extended trip to the DDR, the Narrator notes that passengers look more like

their relatives the closer they get to the Wall. Everyone and everything seems some tint of gray. Passengers line up first thing at the Intershop kiosk to buy liquor and cigarettes. On the station's exterior "traveling headlines" (pg. 39) are displayed.

Ho-Chi-Minh Trail

The Ho-Chi-Minh Trail designates a secret path used by the East German State Security Service to move agents into and back from West Germany. It figures in the tale of Walter Bolle, told to the Narrator by his friend, Robert.

Kurfürstendamm

One of the major avenues in West Berlin, Kurfürstendamm is the destination of Willy Wacholt, Willy Walz, and their movie-addicted friend, Lutz, after the trio jump the Wall. The Europacenter is located in this section, a symbol of BRD prosperity in the era after the Wall goes up. Demonstrators break windows along the Kurfürstendamm from Gedächtniskirche to Halensee without the harming anyone or attracting the police. Robert tells the Narrator that it is staged, to prevent a build-up of popular resentment in the case that a prisoner ever does die in police custody.

Mecklenburg

The Baltic Sea region of northern East Germany, Mecklenburg is where Lena, the Narrator's lover, grows up after World War II in a small town that hosts a Soviet Red Army post. She watches young soldiers working out, picks up poignant Russian songs, and reads Chekhov and Dostoevsky. She is seduced by a Red Army pilot who abandons her. She subsequently leaves the DDR for West Berlin.

Schönefeld Airport

An airport located on the outskirts of East Berlin, Schönefeld is shown separating deplaning passengers onto shuttle buses, where foreigners swear at miserable conditions but Germans keep silent. Inside the terminal, passengers divide by passport to enter the appropriate half of the divided city. Schneider contrasts the physical appearance and mannerisms of the two lines, suggesting how person and nation come together.

Staatssicherheitsdienst

Popularly known as the Stasi, the East German State Security Service is regularly mocked in The Wall Jumper as a pervasive force in society but less effective than their less visible West German equivalents. The tale of Walter Bolle centers around Bolle, a

DDR exile, working with the Stasi in order to convince BRD officials to back his plot to destroy the Wall.

Tegel Landing Strip

An airport located in West Berlin, Tegel when approached from the West requires three overflights of the Wall before landing. Airplanes' shadows are the only things that make that crossing on the ground.

Themes

Mental Conditioning

A recurring theme in The Wall Jumper by Peter Schneider is how the once-unified German people have, after World War II, been conditioned to suspect and stereotype one another. The anonymous Narrator admits that he is not a neutral observer. He cannot understand why Easterners would stay where they are if the opportunity to come West appears. Several such cases occur as the DDR allows dissidents to be ransomed by the BRD for large sums of money.

The Wall has just gone up when the Narrator moves to Berlin. After the initial shock, West Germans see it as both a symbol of a detested social order and as a mirror showing them to be the fairest of all. The Narrator's forays into East Berlin show the two half-cities physically alike but the people subconsciously obeying fundamentally different laws in how they talk and behave—after a mere 30 years. Easterners seem gray in every way. The Narrator's friend Robert, formerly from the Eastern half, denies the existent a "German question" and resents being called "typically DDR" (pg. 21). He is comfortable only as a "boundary-walker" (pg. 23) between states.

Robert's story about Kabe, who jumps the Wall 15 times West-to-East, illustrates the dilemma of the Bonn government denying that there is a legitimate German state other than itself by being powerless to incarcerate the man. being sent each time for psychiatric evaluation and straining German-German relations and finances. The BRD lacks constitutional grounds for institutionalizing him, since from its point of view the DDR does not exist.

The Narrator also sees his ex-lover Lena as a typical product of a DDR education. She laughs spontaneously, sharing catchwords and songs with her sister during a reunion, but unable to accept a Western-style life. She seemingly has phobias about everything and if the Narrator plays down her fears, she considers him an accomplice in them. Figurative language and irony offend her; she demands precision and consistency and is disgusted by the superfluous. Their first quarrels are about how they evaluate perceptions. Lena sees details that the Narrator can afford to miss. Several Easterners declare the Narrator naive and sometimes rather than proclaim a seemingly obvious truth he stays silent.

A woman with slightly-bulging eyeballs illustrates another psychological type: the Western crusader against oppression in the West, who always plays the victim, countering every story of Eastern horrors with worse situations at home. Like all progressive visitors to the East, she destroys the illusions set up by the Western media, to help Eastern friends more readily accept their sad lot. It matters nothing that this distorts reality. Pommerer, an Eastern intellectual on the verge of being deported, claims that East Germans are "more committed, more serious, hungrier" (pg. 117) than

Westerners. The Narrator observes that this generalization cannot be proven and realizes that as intellectuals, neither of them has much contact with true workers.

In an engaging passage, the Narrator wonders at what point he might have rebelled against Eastern compulsion had he grown up in the DDR, influenced by Russian propaganda, reading Nietzsche and Sartre in secret rather than Wilhelm Reich, Lenin, and Marx, as the student movement had encouraged him to do. Recognizing his own psychological conditioning, he wonders how different he might have been, given different formative influences. Would he even be recognizable? Where does the State end and the self begin? If one "finally" (pg. 126) becomes someone again, does this mean s/he previous is nothing?

Media Bias

Whenever author Peter Schneider needs to set up an ideological conflict between his anonymous Narrator and the Narrator's closest friends, he depicts them watching media coverage of current events. Back-to-back presentations on the same event on DDR-TV and Western stations externally look nearly identical in how the the stage is set and newsreaders appear and sound, but the content of each broadcast adheres to the station manager's belief system and, ultimately, to the viewpoint of the respective government. The stations illustrate the stories by using film that illustrates their point of view and quote radically different sources. No opposing point is allowed. The Narrator concludes that both reports are likely true, but each is carefully tailored to show only one side.

The Narrator is shown watching broadcasts on 1) a UN resolution against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 2) a Central American liberation movement, and 3) labor strikes in Poland. In each case, the freedom fighters are shown as pawns of the Great Powers. Having Marxist-inspired and anti-Marxist revolutions allows for balance. The Central American story allows the friends to debate the extent to which the West is still controlled by reactionaries dressed up as democrats, while the East is ruled by true sons of the poor working class.

The Narrator sees postwar Germans as two-dimensional as television figures. Debate over the Polish story, which has the the media showing what they want, fires up as the friends next watch a documentary about recovery from World War II and debate which foreign ideology—democracy or socialism—is better for Germans. The situation in Afghanistan at the end of the book gets tied into the 1980 Summer Olympics and even without news coverage everyone is debating whether the DDR will emerge as a major sports power as much of the world debates. The smart money is on the Soviets forbidding this.

The Narrator experiences the same difficulties watching news with his East German-born friend Robert, who now resides in West Berlin. They inevitably take opposite sides on what is being purported, with Robert seeing hidden motives behind events. He

declares that free choice is a fairy tale for those who choose not to know better and always places blame elsewhere. They nearly come to blows.

History

The Wall Jumper by Peter Schneider largely skirts the question of history, which is remarkable in a book so firmly grounded in a very specific slice of history. The establishment of two political entities after World War II by the victorious Allies is alluded to. In the West, deprogrammed minor Nazis rule while in the East, communists, the only untainted politicians, take over. At any rate, neither democracy nor socialism is native to Germany, so it matters little. It is noted cynically that Germans elected Hitler chancellor by an overwhelming majority. Tourists from both sides strain through binoculars to behold the buried and cordoned off remains of his bunker, suggesting a continuing but hidden legacy. The difference in how the Soviets and Americans treat the defeated German people, including helping them clear the rubble and rebuild vs. piling it up and looting, is given a few paragraphs in the context of the Narrator wondering how he would have turned out had he been raised in the East.

The Wall goes up in 1961, replacing less dramatic and effective means of keeping the residents of East Berlin from fleeing to West Berlin. Initially West Berliners are appalled, but this soon gives way to acceptance of the inevitable and they largely turn the symbol of enslavement into a tourist attraction and mirror on their own superior accomplishments. Easterners cannot figure out why Westerners show so little interest in them and what they are doing. Few Easterners want to live under the Western regime. When they talk about a historic wall, they mean Brandenburg-Prussia. Several times the Narrator alludes to the coming of the Germanic tribes to this region and facing off against the remnants of Imperial Roman power. He seems sincerely interested in the psychology of this invasion and the mystique of the German language, which has survived the rise and fall of three reichs and remains the only unifying factor for all Germans.

The book opens with the Narrator flying into Berlin, crossing the Wall several times as the plane descends. He several times mentions the 120-mile roadway through East Germany to reach West Berlin. Surprisingly he says nothing about the 1948 Airlift. Readers of a certain age will recall the many dramatic runs for freedom made in the 1960s. Schneider refers only to bizarre incidents involving tightrope walking and hot air balloons. He observes that sports like scuba diving that might facilitate escape are banned in the East, but clever sportsmen find ways to make do with homemade gear. The Narrator inaccurately claims that the Berlin Wall, like the Great Wall of China, can be seen from the Moon. The Wall Jumper is more about impressions than facts.

Style

Point of View

The Wall Jumper by Peter Schneider is told primarily in the first person, in a mixture of present and past tenses, by a professional writer who keeps his identity closely secret. He lives in West Berlin and has found that his stories are not working out as well as he had hoped. He is intrigued by people divided symbolically and physically by the Wall and only a few decades of differing experiences under communism and democracy/capitalism. He seeks out stories of people who jump the Wall and is surprised to find that the traffic is two-way.

Several of the stories are told to the Narrator by friends and, as such, are recounted in the third person. Robert is a former East Berliner who has moved, uncomfortably, to the West. Robert relates the tragic/comic stories of Kabe, a bored veteran of 15 jumps, and of Walter Bolle, who wants to lead a vendetta against the DDR but cannot arouse any interest. It emphasizes the similarities between the state police on either side of the border. Around the story the friends are shown arguing constantly about perceptions of life and nearly coming close to blows. Dialog is heavily used in such instances, but always told through the Narrator's reconstructions of the events.

Pommerer in East Berlin is a writer on the outs with the writers' union. He fears that he may soon be exiled. The Narrator offers an aside to the reader explaining why Pommerer's lengthy story about the Three Movie Goers who repeatedly jump the wall could not have happened as he claims and suggests that it has transformed as a result of legend-making. He offers no comments when Pommerer later shares the story of Michael Gartenschläger, who dies after two successful attempts at stealing lethal East German border robots, or when a stranger who appears to know Pommerer overhears them and shares a tale about sticking up for a crazy coworker but bluffing his way out of trouble.

The Narrator is personally responsible for sections about Wolf Biermann, his Aunt Dora, and his psychologically disturbed ex-lover Lena. Most of his and his friends' stories end up being debated and/or dissected. The Narrator admits to cultural and political biases but believes that the others do not see themselves clearly. Several of them confront him with being naïve.

Setting

The Wall Jumper by Peter Schneider takes place in the divided city of Berlin, depicting select scenes from the infamous erection of the Wall in 1961 through the eve of the Moscow Olympics in 1980, which many countries led by the United States boycott to protest the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The anonymous Narrator has lived in West Berlin for 20 years, moving there after World War II from Bavaria. He is a writer having trouble getting his stories right and has decided to collect material about people who jump the Wall. He has friends in both West and East Berlin and the five chapters alternate between the half-cities, beginning in the West. Many scenes are set on West Berlin's major avenue, Kurfürstendamm and in the airport and underground stations that connect the two halves. The Narrator emphasizes at the beginning that from the air Berlin appears one. Throughout the book he shows that on the ground the objects of everyday life are identical, but the two populations can easily be distinguished by the grayness of the Eastern clothing, as well as their dour faces, cowed behavior, and even accents. West Berliners, on the other hand, manifest a sense of triumph.

The book shows West Berlin far better recovered from World War II than East Berlin, thanks to the fact that the victorious Western Allies assist reconstruction while the Soviets loot and demand reparations. Construction is heavy in the East, particularly ugly high-rise apartment buildings that obstruct the view to the West. In town the Wall is not as dangerous as outside, where the approaches are mined. Guards appear lackadaisical about their duties, making crossings not uncommon. The East views the Wall as a national boundary, while the West sees it as a cultural and political affront—and a tourist attraction.

The book takes brief excursions into the countryside near Berlin and further East into Saxony to Dresden. One story refers to a character stealing anti-personnel weapons in Büchen, Saxony, presumably along the Czech border. The postwar influence of the Russians in Mecklenburg are depicted in flashbacks, as are differences in the American and Soviet occupation zones.

Language and Meaning

Originally written in German, The Wall Jumper by Peter Schneider is translated by Leigh Hafrey into flowing, idiomatic, American English. Sentences are generally simple and short. Dialog is abundant. A few German words are left untranslated, generally ones like Schnapps that have somewhat entered the English language. The book is clearly aimed at the original German audience, which could be expected to understand many cultural items without explanation and often get a rich feel for what Schneider is trying to portray simply by a passing allusion. Street names and places in Berlin seem generally meant to evoke images that an English reader might not catch. A few technical terms, generally political, are explained in footnotes. These include the names and abbreviations of the two halves of postwar Germany and the infamous "Stasi" (the East German security police).

The strictly anonymous Narrator is a professional writer of fiction, rather frustrated that his stories are not turning out precisely as he wishes. He takes an interest in the differences between East and West Berliners and sets out to collect stories of people who have "jumped" the Wall. He also deals with those like himself who go back and forth legally through the checkpoints. Friends in the two half-cities offer him appropriate

stories that they have heard. Some at least have taken on the properties of legend as they are told and retold.

The Narrator takes a profound interest in how Germans in the two states perceive one another and deal with the realities of separation. Only politicians worry about the formal "German question" and ultimate reunion. The Narrator shows how in 20 years the mentalities of the two half-peoples have diverged to where knocking down the mental walls will be harder than knocking down the physical wall. Towards the end of the book, the Narrator contemplates how three unholy reichs have come and gone and Germans no longer have what could be termed a fatherland. The mother tongue, however, has since the Middle Ages allowed Germans to define themselves against culturally aggressive neighbors.

Structure

The Wall Jumper by Peter Schneider consists of five numbered but untitled chapters. The first three chapters are fairly uniform in length, while the fourth and fifth are progressively shorter. The over-all organization finds the Narrator physically alternating between the two halves of the divided city of Berlin, beginning where he lives in West Berlin. Chapter 1, however, by describing an airplane landing, shows the city still to be one. Major subdivisions within chapters are indicated by square bullet marks. This rather effectively suggests that a new point is being made.

Chapter 1 introduces Berlin as an artificially divided city. The Narrator's living situation in West Berlin is depicted colorfully. Gradually it is revealed that he is a writer collecting stories about interesting Berliners, East and West, and that he has a penchant for traveling to the other side of the Wall. He is never a Jumper, preferring to go legally through checkpoints, even at the risk of sometimes being turned away. He meets several people who have been forced to abandon lives in the East and hears from one of them about a man who has jumped the wall physically 15 times. Robert, from whom he hears about Kabe, and Kabe himself help illustrate the major theme of how West and East Germans view the postwar division of their fatherland and how the division has in 30 years modified how they think and act.

Chapter 2 takes place in East Berlin, with an excursion into the countryside. The Narrator comments on the artificiality of West-East reunions and hears the story of legendary jumpers, the Three Moviegovers, courtesy of his East Berlin friend, Pommerer. Pommerer's upper-story apartment is being eclipsed by heavy construction. The chapter begins dealing with the Western media's obsession with the shortcomings of socialism and Easterners' resentment over being judged for having resigned their lives to reality.

Chapter 3 returns to West Berlin, where building renovation rather than new construction is the rule. Robert relates the tragic/comic story of Walter Bolle, who wants to lead a vendetta against the DDR but cannot arouse any interest. Together the friends witness a staged protest and disagree over the political subjectivity of media coverage

of current events. Lena's early life is examined to explain the type of the Easterner who cannot adjust to life in the West.

Chapter 4 crosses to East Berlin, where Pommerer is in trouble with the Writers' Union and may need to move West. The Narrator collects two more fairly odd stories. The friends debate the moral superiority of the two nations of Germans and how democracy and socialism are equally foreign to and imposed upon them. The Narrator travels to rural Dresden to meet a widowed aunt and learn how his maternal relatives had managed to prosper both under Nazism and Communism. The awkwardness of reunions is further demonstrated. Events in Poland occasion another debate about media coverage and the Narrator contemplates how his life might have been different had he met the conquering Russians rather than generous Americans in 1945.

Finally, brief Chapter 5 takes place in West Berlin, where the Narrator in his mind alone has it out with Lena about her demanding personality. He and Robert differ over boycotting the Moscow Olympics over Afghanistan. The Narrator is refused entry to East Berlin. He wakes up fearful of loss or change, but realizes that Berlin outlive everyone alive.

Quotes

"Seen from the air, the city seems perfectly homogeneous. Nothing suggests to the stranger that he is nearing a region where two political continents collide." Chapter 1, pgs. 3-4.

"This stillness probably ties in with the Germans' habit of hearing their own noise through their neighbors' ears—a consideration which even three-year-olds are taught to show." Chapter 1, pg. 16.

"Since queries about his impressions of the West were usually tied to the hope that he would pledge allegiance to a Western life-style, he preferred instead to hunt for a no-man's-land between the borders. 'If it's either Erna or Rita,' he would say, 'I won't take either; I'd rather jerk off.'" Chapter 1, pg. 21.

"By comparison, the state to the West, which claimed to be a society, seemed to be far more violent and powerful, invisible but omnipresent. It had crept in through the cracks in apartment doors, crept into the heads of inhabitants; it stared at us from bookshelves, stood beside our beds, and filled our dreams with policemen who pursued us." Chapter 2, pg. 41.

"My story changes from one day to the next. The only sure thing is that the man whose story I want is caught in a back-and-forth motion over the Wall, like a soccer goalie in an instant replay, always taking the same dive to miss the same ball." Chapter 2, pg. 48.

"The distinction between friend and foe seems simpler here than in the West. The myth of the omnipresent ear of the State, even when they refer to it ironically, holds the group together and gives their exchanges the charm of a conspiracy, even though the conspirators are in fact devoted only to the arts." Chapter 2, pg. 64.

"From this point in the story, it is impossible to make out for whom or what Bolle was working: the East, the West, himself, or a united Germany—even Bolle probably no longer knew." Chapter 3, pg. 86.

" 'Your notion of the state is touchingly naïve. You look at it with your child's eyes and believe what you see.'
" 'And you think the state is omnipotent. Everything that happens is preprogrammed, monitored, controlled by invisible hands. You didn't live through the student movement." Chapter 3, pg. 92.

"I responded to Lena's suspicion first by protesting violently against it, then by giving it cause. Only with her hanging over me did I venture to satisfy needs I had long postponed." Chapter 3, pg. 100.

"The dog begins barking, and the officer has a hard time controlling his jolt of fright. The stiff collar of his uniform digs a white furrow into his neck; the furrow quickly fills with

blood as the officer leans forward and barks back at the dog through the microphone. The tenfold amplification drives the dog to wilder barking." Chapter 4, pg. 107.

"Gartenschläger went back alone to the site where he had dismantled his first comrade. But as he stretched his hand out for the comrade that had replaced it, he was riddled by fire from some Kalashnikov automatic rifles." Chapter 4, pg. 113.

" 'But that only proves that neither system is home-grown German.'
" 'True,' says Pommerer. 'But what was better for a people who elected Hitler in a landslide: imposed capitalism or imposed communism?'" Chapter 4, pg. 119.

"But would I have turned out so differently that no one would recognize me? Where does the state end and a self begin?
"We're somebody again. The 'again' always bothered me in that phrase. If you finally become somebody, you must have been nobody once." Part 4, pgs. 125-126.

Topics for Discussion

What is the function of graffiti in this book? What does it say about the two German social systems?

Can the media report without bias? Select one of the current events discussed in the book and analyze how the biases show.

What role does Lena play in the book? Does her inclusion provide insights that would otherwise be missing?

What is the role of Frieda Loch in the book?

How does the East German regime control would-be dissidents? Are the methods effective?

What is the legacy of Nazism and World War II on the German people? Does West and East Germans view the past in the same way?

How does the German language unify the separated German people? How has it unified them in the past?